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## **‘Bringing in Those Who Are Far’**

### *Jewish Sociology and the Reconstruction of Jewish Life in Post-War Europe*

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#### **Abstract**

Sociology played a major role in the reconstruction of European Jewry after 1945. It offered a putatively objective language, enabling Jews of different religious and political leanings to collaborate. With Jewish communities having been devastated by the war, policy makers now sought quantitative data regarding composition, orientation, and the needs of these populations. Through institutions, journals and conferences, American Jewish theories, and models were transferred to Europe, but were channelled for a distinct function. Demographic research and Jewish community centres were developed with the goal of locating and attracting ‘marginal Jews’ so as to reconnect them to community life. Jewish sociology in post-war Europe was part of a major effort towards reconstruction of Jewish communities; this effort was based on scientific methods and aimed at ‘saving’ all remaining Jews for the greater Jewish cause.

#### **Keywords**

Jewish sociology – reconstruction European Jewry – Americanization – Jewish demography – Jewish Cultural Centres – Jewish Joint Distribution Committee

#### **Introduction**

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of November 1963 one of the leading British sociologists, Morris Ginsberg (1889–1970), addressed the Fourth Annual Assembly of the Standing Conference of European Jewish Community Services in Geneva. His task was nothing less than analysing the present situation of the European Jewish communities and formulating some sort of agenda for the future. Ginsberg, the Martin White Professor of Sociology at the London School of Economics

and a Fellow of the British Academy, reviewed the immediate post-war period and concluded, almost to his own surprise, that 'European Jews have proved far more resilient and resourceful than was generally expected.' However he added, 'they would not have been able to achieve as much as they have done without aid from outside,' especially the 'impressive' help provided by American Jewry.<sup>1</sup> Next to examining the demography of the European Jewish communities (which he located solely on the European continent) Ginsberg concentrated on the question of how European Jewry's interdependence with both American and Israeli Jewries would and should determine its character and future. He showed himself a Zionist by assuring the audience that 'whatever new synthesis [of Western and Jewish culture] is attempted is bound to be influenced by the new forms of life emerging in Israel.'

Ginsberg opened his lecture by feigning surprise at his invitation to address the combined leadership of most Western and some Eastern European Jewish communities. By doing so, he demonstrated an awareness of the distinction between academic sociology and Jewish policy making. As this suggests, Ginsberg's invitation and involvement were hardly surprising. Indeed, sociology as a discipline had acquired status as a perceived neutral and objective space in which to discuss the condition of European Jewry; moreover, it enabled Jewish leaders of different leanings – varying from Orthodoxy to secularism – to cooperate and initiate joint projects. Ginsberg had already emerged as one of the professionally trained sociologists who assisted the European Jewish leadership. In 1956 he lectured before the World Jewish Congress and in 1959, at the behest of this international yet primarily European Jewish representative body, he founded the academic journal *Jewish Journal of Sociology*.<sup>2</sup> Academic sociologists prided themselves on their independence and objectivity; in reality however, they were neatly connected with Jewish institutions and policy makers.

This essay will study how sociology and sociologists contributed to the reconstruction of Jewish life in Europe after the Second World War. And more specifically, how sociological theories that had been developed on behalf of American Jewry were transferred to Europe as part of American Jewry's 'impressive' help. Various institutions, journals, and conferences served as vehicles of change in spreading new sociological theories and their practical implications, resulting in both continuities and discontinuities with the

1 Morris Ginsberg, "A Review of the European Jewish Communities Today and Some Questions for Tomorrow," *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 6/1 (1964), 118–131.

2 Geoffrey Alderman and Keith Kahn-Harris, "The *Jewish Journal of Sociology*: a brief history and prospectus," *Jewish Historical Studies* 45 (2013), 159–161.

pre-war period. I will argue that although the same methods and models were used as they had been in the United States, the European context resulted in a different focus. One aimed primarily at locating unaffiliated Jews in order to reconnect them to Jewish community life. This essay consists of three parts: it will first address the changing relations between Europe and the United States; it will then study the introduction and application of the model of the Jewish cultural centre all over Europe; finally, it will examine demographic and socio-logical research, centred around the case of Dutch Jewry.

## 1 American Jewry, Israel and Europe

The dramatic events of the 1940s altered the composition of world Jewry significantly. First, the Second World War and the Shoah decimated Europe's Jewish population, and many of the survivors fled to the United States and Palestine. Second, the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 affirmed the emergence of a new creative, intellectual and political centre within world Jewry. Finally, with the majority of the world's Jews now living in the United States, American Jewry was without question the dominant factor within the international Jewish population. Although American Jewry had established itself as a major block even before the war, in many respects Europe was still regarded as the centre of world Jewry. The major rabbis and yeshivot were found in Eastern Europe; likewise, Reform Jewry and scholarly research in the tradition of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* had firm roots in Central Europe. Additionally, the headquarters of the World Zionist Organization had been established in London. After 1945 American Jewry had to step forth and replace Europe as a dominant centre, soon to be joined by Israel as a second Jewish centre. Europe however, transformed from centre to periphery, shifting dramatically from leading and initiating projects to serve world Jewry and into a recipient of aid, relief work, and guidance.<sup>3</sup>

Next to these acute changes in both demography and the geographic distribution of leading institutions, European Jews themselves underwent ideological reorientation. While before the Second World War the Zionist movement had been a vocal and often effective voice in the debate on 'the Jewish question', even in its heyday it had never attracted more than a minority within European Jewish communities. A mixture of firm Jewish adherence to European nationalisms as well as Orthodox and Reform religious objections,

3 Selwyn Ilan Troen (ed.), *Jewish Centers & Peripheries: Europe between America and Israel Fifty Years after World War II* (New Brunswick & London: Transaction Publishers, 1999), 1–5.

prevented Zionism from becoming more than one amongst various minority voices in European Jewry.<sup>4</sup> Once the war ended however, Zionism emerged as the dominant ideological frame for most of Europe's Jews. Zionist representatives established themselves firmly on the boards of Jewish community organizations. More importantly Zionist ideology changed the image of Europe from one of 'home' and into one of 'exile'. Pre-war Jewish enthusiasms for various other nationalisms were quickly supplanted by Jewish nationalism as the solution to the remaining 'Jewish question.'

The combination of ruined Jewish communities and the rise of Zionism turned Europe into an element of the Zionist doctrine of 'shelilat ha-galut,' the 'negation of the Diaspora.'<sup>5</sup> Recent developments had demonstrated that Europe could no longer be 'home' to Jews and that, if they desired to retain their Jewish identity they needed to leave, preferably for Palestine/Israel. Given the dominance of Zionists in post-war European Jewish institutions their formal objective was, paradoxically, to reconstruct Jewish communal life in order to dissolve it soon thereafter. The reconstruction of continental European Jewry was driven by both a paucity of belief in a viable European future and an agenda of migration from peripheries to centres.

The three 'pillars' (in Diana Pinto's terminology) of America, Israel, and Europe each had its own role in the reconstruction of Jewish life on the continent.<sup>6</sup> Israel exerted tremendous influence through Israeli embassies, national Zionist federations; and youth movements, specifically via ideological training and reorienting European Jewish life towards the State of Israel. American Jewry largely supported Israeli policies and now assumed a different, more practical role, by instigating what has been labelled a 'Jewish Marshall Plan.' Leading American Jewish relief organizations, predominantly the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), offered extensive financial help and developed new structures by which to reconstruct European Jewry.<sup>7</sup> Europe, although primarily a recipient in the perspective of the other 'pillars', was not merely

4 Bernard Wasserstein, *On the Eve: The Jews of Europe before the Second World War* (London: Profile Books, 2012), passim.

5 Coined by Yosef Klausner in 1901; cf. Stanley Nash, *In Search of Hebraism: Shai Hurwitz and His Polemics in the Hebrew Press* (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 353–355.

6 Diana Pinto, "A new role for Jews in Europe: challenges and responsibilities" in Sandra Lustig and Ian Leveson (eds.), *Turning the kaleidoscope: Perspectives on European Jewry* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 27–40.

7 Yehuda Bauer, *Out of the ashes. The impact of American Jews on post-Holocaust European Jewry* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1989); see also e.g. for the Belgian case: Veerle Vanden Daelen, *Laten we hun lied verder zingen: De heropbouw van de joodse gemeenschap in Antwerpen na de Tweede Wereldoorlog (1944–1960)* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2008), esp. 96–118.

a passive player. National conditions, pre-war traditions, and involvement of local Jews resulted in a negotiated process that (as Laura Hobson Faure has analysed for French Jewry) should be 'understood as a European-American dialogue, rather than an American monologue.'<sup>8</sup>

In recent decades the processes of reconstruction for various European Jewish communities have been extensively researched, leading to various comparative overviews. The role of sociology and sociologists, however, has thus far received little attention.<sup>9</sup> Historiography tends to concentrate on the concrete shape that post-war communities assumed, rather than on the ideologies and methods that directed policy makers and institutions in their courses of action. Yet sociology functioned as a critically important common language by which nearly all participants in the reconstruction effort evaluated which policies would be most effective. As in other domains, American sociological models had tremendous influence, but the conditions of European Jewry resulted in various actors taking different directions.

## 2 Transfer of American Jewish Models

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 1948 'Joods Maatschappelijk Werk,' the newly established national Jewish welfare organisation in the Netherlands, appointed Malkah Weinman-Polaczek its adjunct director. Weinman-Polaczek had extensive experience in social work in pre-war Austria, her country of origin, where she had served in Vienna's childcare unit (Städtisches Jugendamt). During her detention in the concentration camp Theresienstadt she continued her work by operating an orphanage. However, it was not her (pre-)war experience that rendered Weinman-Polaczek the best candidate for the function. In 1946 she had travelled to New York on a fellowship from the National Council of Jewish Women in the United States, and studied for two years at Columbia University's New York School of Social Work. American training would prove to be the key to progress on the European continent.<sup>10</sup>

8 Laura Hobson Faure, "American Jewish Mobilization in France after World War II: Crossing the Narratives," *Transatlantica* 1 (2014). <http://transatlantica.revues.org/6961> (accessed 17 October 2015).

9 Wasserstein, Bernard, *Vanishing Diaspora: The Jews in Europe since 1945* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); David Weinberg, *Recovering a Voice: West European Jewish Communities after the Holocaust* (Oxford & Portland, OR: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2015).

10 On the role of the National Council of Jewish Women – in cooperation with the Joint: Laura Hobson Faure, "Le travail social dans les organisations juives françaises après la

Weinman-Polaczek drew two major conclusions from her training in New York. First, she ascribed the lead of American Jewry over European Jewry, especially in the domain of social work, to the fact that the former held 'research' in such high esteem. All policy making whether on childcare or fundraising, was founded on proper sociological, psychological or economic research. Second, next to individual social-case work, American Jews had extensive social-group work. While myriad Jewish clubs and organizations had existed in pre-war Europe, nearly all had been private initiatives and lacked professionally trained social workers. Weinman-Polaczek was particularly impressed by the American phenomenon of 'Jewish community centres,' such clubs typically included a swimming pool, library, kosher restaurant and rooms for youth groups and social activities. The leader of the 'Jewish community centre,' usually a trained 'community organizer,' functioned as a central figure in the local community and was expected to help Jewish youth to grow in their right of self-determination and democratic principles.<sup>11</sup>

Sooner than expected both of Weinman-Polaczek's conclusions were adopted by European Jewish communities. Sociological research (including demography) enjoyed some status before the Second World War but had remained the initiative of individual scholars or scholarly associations.<sup>12</sup> After 1945 Jewish institutions throughout Europe turned to sociologists to provide well-researched analyses to enhance proper policy making. Before the war, community leaders had been expected to know their flock well. In the post-war situation however, they lacked even most basic knowledge about the surviving Jewish population, including reliable information about how many Jews remained, where they lived, and how they related to their Jewish identity.

### 3 From American to European Jewish Community Centres

In 1949 Weinman-Pollaczek still considered Jewish community centres ideal yet utopian spaces for European Jews. Yet within a few years the concept spread rapidly across the continent. The main instigators were the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and the Conference on Jewish Material

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Shoah: Création made in France ou importation américaine?," *Archives Juives* 45/1 (2012), 43–60.

11 M. Weinman-Pollaczek, "Joods sociaal werk in Amerika," *Nieuw Israëlietisch Weekblad* 25 February and 25 March 1949.

12 Mitchell B. Hart, *Social Science and the Politics of Modern Jewish Identity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 56–73.

Claims against Germany, commonly known as the Claims Conference. The latter was established in 1951 in order to represent Diaspora Jewry next to Israel in negotiations with the Bundesrepublik Deutschland (BDR) on *Wiedergutmachung*. As a result, the Claims Conference administered distribution of re-claimed funds amounting to \$60 billion. Instead of simply returning capital to various national Jewish communities, the Claims Conference decided in close collaboration with the Joint, to connect restitution to its own agenda. National Jewish communities could apply for funding, but only within the parameters set by the Claims Conference.<sup>13</sup>

From 1954 onward the spearhead of the Claims Conference's master plan for European Jewry, was the founding of Jewish community centres. This involved no less than half the Claims Conference overall budget and entailed deliberate transfer of a successful American Jewish concept to the European continent. One of the main reasons behind the success of this campaign for community centres was that it was highly researched and advocated by leading sociologists.

The Jewish community centre, with its roots in the late nineteenth century and growing out of local Young Men's Hebrew Associations and B'nai B'rith Lodges, became a dominant feature within twentieth-century American Jewry. The typical community centre was nondenominational and open to Jews of any persuasion, even as community centres-annex-synagogue entered the scene, starting with Mordecai Kaplan's reconstructionist 'Jewish center.' Rabbi Lionel Blue pointedly labelled the latter in Americanized Yiddish as 'shul mit a pool.' All community centres, as David Kaufman argued, had four characteristics in common:

'A "Jewish center" is (1) a service agency, offering a variety of activities and social benefits to its mainly Jewish constituents; (2) a communal gathering place, housed in centrally located building, and forming an integral part of the local Jewish neighborhood; (3) a unifying factor, open to all Jews of the community regardless of their religious affiliation or class status; and (4) a sectarian institution fostering Jewish culture and Jewish education, hence a primary locus of Jewish identification'.<sup>14</sup>

13 Ronald W. Zweig, *German Repatriations and the Jewish World: A History of the Claims Conference*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London & Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2001); Marilyn Henry, *Confronting the Perpetrators: A History of the Claims Conference* (London & Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2007).

14 David Kaufman, *Shul with a Pool: The "Synagogue-Center" in American Jewish History* (Hanover & London: Brandeis University Press, 1999), 3.



By the middle of the century the Jewish community centre had developed into the main strategy in the suburbanization of American Jewry. The community centre was supposed to offer leisure and inspiration to Jews living in suburbia, allowing them to adjust to a modern lifestyle while retaining Jewish content. The 'father of American Jewish sociology', Marshall Sklare, had, already, in his classic 1955 study on Conservative Judaism, portrayed the Conservative synagogue as being particularly attractive to middle-class American Jews, especially in its assuming 'house of assembly' aspects of Jewish community centres. His further sociological studies strengthened the case of Jewish community centres, integrating social activities, religious worship and education. According to Sklare, this new type of community building – in contrast to traditional synagogues, which often remained dominant in city centres – was successful for reasons related to changes in residential patterns and levels of acculturation, particularly in reconciling middle-class lifestyles with Judaism. 'Shul' and 'pool,' rather than being juxtaposed, were now connected.<sup>15</sup>

With Jewish community centres ascendant in the American suburbs, the model was chosen by the Joint and the Claims Conference to serve as blueprint for the reconstruction of European Jewish community life. Instead of pre-war synagogue-centred communities, these modern institutions were supposed to unify the various religious and political streams into one 'neutral' space. This unity discourse had practical incentives, as American aid organizations wished to deal with only one counterpart per country; moreover, the discourse was ideologically grounded in the Zionist doctrine of the unity of the Jewish people, despite the people's religious and political variegations. Community centres in the European context were supposed to decentre the synagogue, thereby constructing a unified 'secular' social and cultural Jewish identity that superseded religious divisions.<sup>16</sup>

The often weak Jewish communities struggled to rebuild their institutions and synagogues and relied heavily on external funding. The Claims Conference's policy explicitly preferred the founding of community centres above rebuilding of pre-war synagogues, and the policy soon resulted in resounding

15 Marshall Sklare, *Conservative Judaism: An American Religious Movement* (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1955), 132–145; idem (ed.), *The Jews: Social Patterns of an American Group* (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1958), esp. 169–320; Kaufman, *Shul with a Pool*, 7–8.

16 A striking example of this strategy is the advice by the Permanent Committee of the Dutch Orthodox Organisation NIK to the local community in Maastricht to sell its synagogue and instead construct – with the help of the JDC – a Jewish community centre. Jewish Community Centre Amsterdam (JCC), archive Nederlands Israëlitisch Kerkgenootschap (NIK), minutes Permanent Committee 5 July 1962. Ultimately, however, the Jews of Maastricht opted to keep their historic synagogue.

successes. Within five years after 1954 no less than 42 centres had been erected across Europe; by 1962 there were more than 80. Jewish community centres were operational not just in Europe's capitals such as Paris, Brussels, and Athens but also in much smaller communities like Malmö and Greek Trikala. Typical of these community centres was a mixture of social and cultural activities – varying from dance events, theatre performances and movies to sports and Hebrew courses – alongside hosting other Jewish organizations, notably the various youth movements.<sup>17</sup>

Both the JDC and the Claims Conference strictly supervised the rapid spread of Jewish community centres across Europe. The JDC's Geneva headquarters served as the main centre from where the concept was implemented in Europe. Just as American Jews strove for closer collaboration on national levels, they also forced European Jews to collaborate within new transnational European Jewish structures. These Europe-wide structures were yet another innovation as compared to the pre-war situation.

Already in 1959 the JDC assembled its European Jewish partners in order to create a forum for community leaders reaching beyond national boundaries in order to exchange views and discuss common problems. The list of founding members reads as a 'who's who' of contemporary European Jewry, with names ranging from Heinz Galinski (Germany), Claude Kelman (France), H. Oscar Joseph (Great Britain) to, among others, Gunnar Josephson (Sweden), Astorre Mayer (Italy) and Léon Maierdorf (Belgium). Initially the members met regularly, together with the JDC's country directors from throughout Europe. After five years in 1964, they formally founded the 'Standing Conference of European Jewish Community Services', aimed at representing the central welfare organizations of the Jewish communities of Europe. The Standing Conference became formally independent from the Joint, but continued to coordinate its policies closely with the American allies-annex-sponsors.<sup>18</sup>

One of the main commissions of the Standing Conference concerned community centres. The progress of the concept's spread was monitored, models were shared and above all education was offered. As in the United States, the

17 Gfd. [Manfred Gerstenfeld], "Community Centers. Drie jaar praktijk in Brussel," *Nieuw Israëlietisch Weekblad* 11 May 1962; for the case of the Amsterdam Jewish community centre, see: Bart Wallet, "Verschuivende grenzen. De topografie van Joods Amsterdam," in idem, Paul van Trigt and Hans Polak, *Die ons heeft laat leven: Geschiedenis van de Joodse Gemeente Amsterdam [NIHS] van 1945 tot 2010* (Amsterdam: Nederlands Israëlietische Hoofdsynagoge, 2011), 60–62.

18 JDC Archives New York-Jerusalem, folder on the Standing Conference, including correspondence, minutes and a list of founding members, 1959–64.

directors of the community centres – as opposed to mainly pre-war functionaries – needed to be effectively trained. Beginning in 1949 the Joint operated an American-modelled Paul Baerwald School of Social Work, initially in a castle at Versailles, but from 1958 it was located in Jerusalem and connected to the Hebrew University.<sup>19</sup> Directors and staff of European Jewish community centres were invited, and often funded, to receive professional training at the Baerwald School. The curriculum included an introduction to the basics of sociological research. The Israeli connection, including involvement of the Jewish Agency, was also considered important: the directors of community centres were in close contact with local Jewish youth, whom they encouraged to emigrate to Israel.<sup>20</sup>

Although American Jewry's concept of the Jewish community centre was successfully exported to European Jewry, it served a markedly different function on the European continent. In the United States the rise of suburban Jewish community centres was part of an effort to Americanize Jewish community life, in order to connect Jews more fully to American national identity. American Jewish sociologists simultaneously described and prescribed patterns of articulating Jewish identity as integrally American. The language of the 'ethnic group' as proposed by the Chicago School sociologists, was widely adopted by Jewish sociologists, as it opened a way to both strengthen Jewish identity and present it as fully American. The assumption was that all Americans were members of subgroups, meaning that ethnic affiliation was a basic requirement of Americanness. A sociologically defined ethnic Jewish identity replaced preceding religious articulations of Judaism, just as American civic religion was de-Christianized in order to include Jews as well. The Jewish community centre, from this perspective, took its rightful position next to similar institutions for Irish, Italian, and other ethnic subgroups who together defined American social structure.<sup>21</sup>

The American Jewish community centre, thus, was characterized by the attempt to restructure Jewish life to better fit into the social fabric of society. Its European sister however, was directed not outwards but inwards. Instead of self-conscious repositioning in society, the European Jewish community centre was part of an attempt to connect the remaining Jews, who were spread

19 Weinberg, *Recovering a Voice*, 125–7; Hobson Faure, "Le travail social".

20 JDC Archives New York-Jerusalem, folder on the Standing Conference, communiqué 25 May 1964.

21 Lila Corwin Berman, *Speaking of Jews: Rabbis, Intellectuals, and the Creation of an American Public Identity* (Berkeley & Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 2009), 90–96.

throughout society. The European Jewish community centre, typically was presented as one of the instruments by which to reach unaffiliated and even assimilated Jews. The traditional synagogue as the central Jewish space attracted only the religious core group, whereas the community centre was intended to reach a much broader group of Jews.

It is precisely here that we encounter the main difference between American and European Jewish sociology in the post-war era. American Jewish sociologists successfully helped in fashioning an American vocabulary of Jewishness, one aimed at rendering Jews and Judaism more respectable in the public domain. European Jewish sociologists however, were instead part of an agenda often described as *kiruv rehokim*, 'bringing in those who are far.' Originally, this phrase had been employed in the pre-war period by the Ultra-Orthodox Agudas Yisroel movement, as expression of its attempts to attract non-Orthodox Jews to a more religious lifestyle. After the war the expression was widely adopted by European Jewish community leaders, Zionists, and Orthodox and Reform Jews alike, and was intended to bring unaffiliated Jews into closer contact with Jewish community life. Locating and finding ways to attract the *rehokim* was one of the incentives for demographic and sociological research commanded by Jewish institutions.<sup>22</sup>

#### 4 Locating the 'Marginal Jew'

Weinman-Pollaczek argued that American Jewry had a lead over European Jews because of the central place reserved for research in the process of policy making. Pre-war Europe and especially the German-Jewish community, already knew a significant tradition of sociological research. But it was only after 1945 that official representative bodies, inspired by the example of American Jews, started to commission sociological studies. Jewish sociologists, some employed by Europe's leading research universities, cooperated with national and transnational Jewish organizations in studying the composition, trends and motivations of continental European Jewish communities. While most studies were conducted within the parameters of the nation-state, researchers

22 For an overview of the history of Jewish demography and its methodology, see: Dominique Schnapper, "Les limites de la démographie des juifs de la diaspora," *Revue française de sociologie* 28/2 (1987), 319–332; Sergio DellaPergola, "Jewish Demography: Fundamentals of the Research Field," in Uzi Rebhun (ed.), *The Social Scientific Study of Jewry: Sources, Approaches, Debates* [Studies in Contemporary Jewry Vol. xxvii] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 3–36.

and institutions created transnational spaces to interact, share, and compare their projects and results. Next to the London-based *Jewish Journal of Sociology* – the European counterpart to the American *Jewish Social Studies* – several conferences provided a research community for the parties involved. Interestingly these developments mirrored constructions of comparable transnational structures among (for example) West European Catholics, although Jewish sociologists nowhere referred to these as a source of inspiration.<sup>23</sup>

The Brussels 'Centre national des hautes études juives,' founded in 1959 and part of the Université Libre de Bruxelles, took a major role under the inspiring leadership of Max Gottschalk.<sup>24</sup> In 1962 the CNHEJ organised, in conjunction with the university's sociological institute and the Institute of Contemporary Jewry of the Hebrew University Jerusalem, a pioneering conference devoted entirely to demography and sociology of contemporary European Jewry. It resulted in a separate 'Comité pour l'Étude de la Démographie des Juifs d'Europe' organising its own meetings, which started in 1964. Most of the papers presented at these conferences dealt extensively with the methodological problems of adequately analysing post-Shoah communities; indeed, Jewish sociology was even qualified as 'an experiment in progress' (Charlotte Roland-Lowenthal).<sup>25</sup> The participants of a subsequent major sociological conference in 1967, organized by the same partners, demonstrated much more confidence: the discipline had showed its use and effectiveness; Jewish communities had not vanished but had generally managed to stabilize or even grow; and besides proper demographic papers there was even an entire session devoted to 'le renouveau de la culture juive,' the Jewish cultural renaissance then occurring.<sup>26</sup>

23 As neatly analysed in the article by Chris Dols in the present volume.

24 Rudy Van Doorslaer and Jean-Philippe Schreiber (eds.), *Curatoren van het getto: De Verening van de joden in België tijdens de nazi-bezetting* (Tielt: Lannoo Uitgeverij, 2004), 16, 112, 320, 328–330.

25 *La vie juive dans l'Europe contemporaine/Jewish Life in Contemporary Europe. Actes du Colloque tenu à l'Institut du Sociologie de l'Université Libre de Bruxelles du 19 au 21 septembre 1962* (Brussels: Éditions de l'Institut de Sociologie de l'Université Libre de Bruxelles, 1965); *Rapport de la réunion du Comité pour l'étude de la démographie des Juifs d'Europe* (Jerusalem & Brussels: Institut du judaïsme contemporain de l'Université hébraïque de Jérusalem; Centre National des hautes études juives Bruxelles, 1964).

26 Willy Bok and U.O. Schmelz eds., *Démographie et identité juives dans l'Europe contemporaine. Les actes du 2me Colloque sur la vie juive dans l'Europe contemporaine, tenu à ... Bruxelles, du 9 au 12 janvier 1967* (Brussels: Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1972); Moshe Davis a.o., *Le renouveau de la culture juive* (Brussels: Éditions de l'Institut de Sociologie de l'Université Libre de Bruxelles, 1968).

The lists of participants of these Brussels conferences demonstrate the close connection between academic research and Jewish community life. Leading scholars from throughout Europe and from Israel – including Roberto Bachi, Abraham Moles, Hans Guth, Sergio DellaPergola, Moshe Davis and Doris Bensimon – met with community leaders, JDC representatives, (chief) rabbis, Jewish politicians and directors of Jewish community centres. In short, Jewish sociology was not a discipline solely aimed at increasing academic knowledge, but rather one that primarily served the best interests of Jewish leaders, aid organisations, and community workers.<sup>27</sup>

Among those present were representatives and researchers of the various demographic studies commissioned by official Jewish bodies such as the Board of Deputies of British Jews. The 'Committee for the Demography of the Jews in the Netherlands' was represented at the conferences by several of its members. Here I will single out the case of Dutch Jewry, as it is exemplary for post-war European developments at large. Before the war demographic and sociological research on the 140,000-people-strong Jewish community of the Netherlands had never been commissioned by the leading body, the Nederlands Israëlitisch Kerkgenootschap. Individuals such as the Amsterdam socialist politician Emanuel Boekman were the first to acquire demographic data on Dutch Jewry, with information varying from basic population numbers to measurements of religious adherence and social practices. Boekman's research method was one of studying Jews as part of Dutch society at large, with much attention given to comparisons with other religious subgroups such as Protestants and Catholics.<sup>28</sup> In 1954 the shared Jewish institutions (including the NIK, JMW, and the Portuguese Israelite Community), noted explicitly that Boekman's 1936 book was no longer usable, and thus commissioned a new demographic study.<sup>29</sup>

27 *La vie juive* and *Démographie et identité juives*. In this respect, European Jewish sociology reflected similar tendencies as in the Catholic world, see e.g. Benjamin Ziemann's article in the present volume.

28 Emanuel Boekman, *Demografie van de Joden in Nederland* (Amsterdam: Menno Hertzberger & Co., 1936). His research in the field of historical demography had already been published before in the leading Dutch sociological journal: Emanuel Boekman, "De verspreiding der Joden over Nederland 1830–1930," *Mensch en Maatschappij* 10 (1934), 175–196. He had been preceded with some preliminary observations by J.H. van Zanten, "Enige demografische gegevens over de Joden van Amsterdam," *Mensch en Maatschappij* 2 (1926), 1–24.

29 Isaac Lipschits, *Tsedaka: Een halve eeuw Joods Maatschappelijk Werk in Nederland* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 1997), 123; earlier attempts relied on the unreliable 1947 census and were deemed not to be suitable as a basis for policy making; Arie Pais, "De Joden in Nederland. Demografische beschouwingen n.a.v. de laatste volkstelling," *Joodse Wachter*

The main investigators were dr. Frits Grewel, dr. Aron Vedder, and Alexander Veffe, who were assisted by officials from the Ministry of Social Affairs, the national Central Bureau of Statistics and the Amsterdam Municipal Bureau of Statistics. All formal Jewish communities – mostly nominally Orthodox – contributed local materials.<sup>30</sup>

The objective of the study was ‘to know the number of Jews and the composition of the Jewish population, in order to efficiently rebuild Jewish social work in the Netherlands and to be prepared for future needs.’ Specific mention was made of long-term planning for orphanages, schools, elderly homes, and social-cultural work. The results published after two years of research found a total of 23,723 Jews in the Netherlands – including 3,100 Jews living in mixed marriage – and sketched an overall sombre outlook for the future. No less than 42 percent of the Jewish population were non-paying members of one of the three Jewish denominations – the NIK, the Portuguese Israelite Denomination and the Reform community – and thus were not involved in the ‘inner circle’ of community life. A sharp decrease in the number of births, coupled with continuing emigration and growing overrepresentation of the elderly, suggested above all that prioritization be given to development of policies for extension of elderly homes.<sup>31</sup> Despite such bleak findings some found the overall tone of the final report overly optimistic. The University of Amsterdam economist and Zionist leader Salomon Kleerekoper qualified the study ‘a dangerous guide for planning of Jewish social work.’ He claimed that the researchers had lost themselves in sociological differentiations and foregone the objective of developing a practical agenda for the near future. In particular according to Kleerekoper, the problematic question of ‘who is a Jew’ had been defined too broadly, resulting in an inflated number of Dutch Jews.<sup>32</sup>

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25 January 1952, 15–20; F. Grewel, “De Joden van Amsterdam,” *Mens en Maatschappij* 30 (1950), 338–50.

30 “Demografisch onderzoek,” *Nieuw Israëlietisch Weekblad* 13 June 1954; Jewish Community Centre Amsterdam, archive Nederlands Israëlitisch Kerkgenootschap (NIK), minutes Permanent Committee 1959; one of the researchers, Veffe, had been commissioned with demographic research by the wartime ‘Jewish Council of Amsterdam’. He mainly applied Boekman’s categories on the Amsterdam Jews in the early war years 1941–42.

31 Aron Vedder, “Demografie van de Joden in Nederland,” *Nieuw Israëlietisch Weekblad* 5 October 1956; “Donkere toekomst,” *Nieuw Israëlietisch Weekblad* 13 October 1956; the final report was finally published in: idem ed., *De Joden in Nederland na de Tweede Wereldoorlog: Een demografische analyse* (Amsterdam: Joachimsthal, 1961).

32 Salomon Kleerekoper, “De Joden in Nederland na de tweede wereldoorlog. Een demografische analyse (slot),” *Nieuw Israëlietisch Weekblad* 27 January 1961.

The demographic study itself and criticism such as Kleerekoper's prompted community leaders to issue a large-scale proper sociological research project, for which the Jewish social psychologist Sylvain Wijnberg was tasked.<sup>33</sup> He was given full access to the membership files of the Nederlands Israëlitische Hoofdsynagoge Amsterdam, the historic and still dominant Orthodox Ashkenazi community, whose administration still included a majority of Amsterdam Jews.<sup>34</sup> Wijnberg restricted his research to Amsterdam, where half of the country's Jews lived, and conducted his research through a survey and interviews in the years 1962–63. In 1967 he defended his research results as a PhD at the University of Amsterdam.<sup>35</sup>

Strikingly Wijnberg hardly mentions American Jewish scholarship explicitly – ranging from Marshall Sklare to Will Herberg – although he compares his findings mainly with Antonovsky's study on the Jews of New Haven, Connecticut.<sup>36</sup> Whereas Boekman in the pre-war period had consistently compared his results with Dutch Protestants and Catholics, the intra-Dutch comparisons were replaced by Wijnberg with comparisons with international Jewish communities. Moreover, while Boekman had relied mainly on the results of the Dutch census, and thus on the methods and categories of contemporary Dutch sociologists and scientists, Wijnberg took most of his survey questions from American examples.<sup>37</sup>

33 Next to Wijnberg's purely sociological approach, also a new demographic study was commissioned, resulting in: Philip van Praag (ed.), *Demografie van de joden in Nederland. Uitkomsten en evaluatie van een telling van de joden in Nederland per 1 januari 1966. Onder verantwoordelijkheid van de Commissie voor Demografie der Joden in Nederland* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1971). Cf. Jewish Community Centre Amsterdam, archive NIK, minutes Permanent Committee 1961.

34 Jewish Community Centre Amsterdam, archive NIK, minutes Permanent Committee 1959; City Archives Amsterdam, archive Nederlands Israëlitische Hoofdsynagoge Amsterdam, inv.nrs. 3383–3397, minutes board 1954–1967. Initially Wijnberg wanted to concentrate on Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague and then afterwards study the whole of the Netherlands. In the end, however, he had to restrict his research to Amsterdam, as advised by Max Gottschalk (Brussels).

35 Sylvain Wijnberg, *De Joden van Amsterdam: Een studie over veranderingen in hun attitudes* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1967).

36 Wijnberg, *Joden van Amsterdam*, 24–28; Aaron Antonovsky, *The Ideologies of American Jews: A Study of a Marginal Situation* [unpublished PhD Dissertation, Yale University, 1955].

37 Wijnberg, *Joden van Amsterdam*, 32–33. Some of the questions Wijnberg copied from a survey conducted by Charlotte Roland (Collège de France) among the Basle Jews and some French Jewish communities; overall, however, he is quite critical of Roland's methodology. Cf. Charlotte Roland, *Du Ghetto à l'Occident: Deux générations yiddiches en France* (Paris: Éditions du Minuit, 1962).



Nonetheless, as was the case with Jewish community centres, Wijnberg's application of these models was 'Europeanized' in the course of the research. Wijnberg did not restrict his focus to demography, as had the preceding 1956 study, but delved deeper into the change of attitudes in post-war Amsterdam Jewry. He acquired and analysed data on Jewish marriage patterns, religious adherence, circumcision, celebration of Jewish and Christian holidays, participation in Jewish community structures, and perceptions of the State of Israel. He concluded that no less than 50 to 70 percent of Jews in the Netherlands could be labelled as 'marginal Jews', a term which in his opinion, was not just a social-scientific label but also a psychological diagnosis.

The concept of the 'marginal Jew' can be traced to the 1926 'marginal man' theory of Robert Ezra Park, which aimed to describe people of mixed ethnic or racial adherence. A marginal person was someone who lived in two different societies and in whose personality the two conflicting subgroup identities melted.<sup>38</sup> In the 1940's and 1950's American Jewish sociologists applied Park's theory to the Jewish case, often in an optimistic tone of describing Jewish-American symbiosis.<sup>39</sup> In contrast, in the work of the German Jewish immigrant and Zionist Kurt Lewin (a leading social psychologist of the time), the term 'marginal Jew' carried a more pessimistic overtone. In his 1948 *Resolving Social Conflicts*, Lewin argued that Jews in modern society needed to have a distinct space wherein they could be on their own. Historically Jews had formed their own corporate 'Jewish Nation' – also in the State of Israel – where they were among themselves; now however, European and American Jews were in danger. Those who were unconnected to Jewish community life would suffer loneliness, resulting in doubt, psychological problems and insecurity. Jews outside the borders of the community were perceived by outsiders as Jews, yet in reality they were on their own. They were 'marginal Jews,' as they did not truly belong to either the Jewish community or the outside Gentile world.<sup>40</sup>

Wijnberg adopted Lewin's theory and applied it in the context of European Jewry. A vast number of Jews, at least in Amsterdam, were barely involved in Jewish community life. As a social psychologist Wijnberg made the following

38 Robert E. Park, "Human Migration and the Marginal Man," *American Journal of Sociology* 33 (1928), 881–893.

39 Aaron Antonovsky, "Toward a Refinement of the "Marginal Man" Concept," in Werner Bergmann (ed.), *Error Without Trial. Psychological Research on Antisemitism* (Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1988), 162–171.

40 Kurt Lewin, *Resolving Social Conflicts: Selected Papers on Group Dynamics* (New York: Harper, 1948), 176–180.

diagnosis: these 'marginal Jews' were in need of 'therapy' and 'education' and – in order to become balanced, mature personalities – had to connect with either the Orthodox or the Reform community, 'simply because they are the only institutions, that really represent something.' In order to reach the 'marginal Jews' Wijnberg suggested strong leadership, use of modern communication techniques, and above all personal attention via pastoral care and social workers.<sup>41</sup>

The religious language of *rehokim*, 'those who are far' from Judaism, was replaced by the sociologic qualification of 'marginal Jews' with a psychological diagnosis attached. The incentive was clear: unaffiliated Jews were in danger of losing their Jewish identity, while Jewish communities had lost their relevance and influence for significant numbers of Jews. Sociological research such as Wijnberg's was intended to result in new strategies for reconnecting the 'marginal Jews' to communal life and thereby 'curing' them of their condition. Wijnberg however, assembled an impressive set of valuable data, yet failed to offer Jewish policy makers a clear set of instruments by which to reconnect the *rehokim*. No doubt this was because of his primary definition of Jewish identity: only a religious and/or Zionist understanding and practice was deemed to offer a full-fledged, coherent system of meaning. Cultural expressions of Jewish identity in his analysis could serve to reconnect some 'marginal Jews' to the real core – namely Jewish religiosity – but could not offer any distinct, self-sufficient articulation of Jewish identity. It was only in the next decade that cultural forms of Judaism positioned themselves as independent of, and often in opposition to, religious and Zionist definitions of Jewish identity.<sup>42</sup>

The role of sociology, and the Jewish community centre as its 'best practice' for reconnecting 'marginal Jews' to the religious base, were surely major reasons that criticisms such as Henk Berkhof's (in the case of Dutch Protestantism) were scarcely voiced.<sup>43</sup> While Orthodox leaders and rabbis preferred religious discourse over sociological terminology, they saw sociologists as allies both in the fight against assimilation and in the daunting efforts to rebuild European Jewry out of the ashes. Most European Orthodox Jews cooperated freely with American aid organisations such as the JDC, although some concentrated on rebuilding and reorganising their own subgroup structures rather

41 Wijnberg, *Joden van Amsterdam*, 135–137.

42 Bart Wallet, "Een familie van gemeenschappen. De dynamiek van joods Nederland in de naoorlogse periode," in Peter van Dam, James Kennedy en Friso Wielenga (eds.), *Achter de zuilen. Op zoek naar religie in naoorlogs Nederland* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014), 135–154.

43 As neatly analysed in Herman Paul's article in the present volume.

than on expending energy working with overarching 'secular' organisations. They were assisted by a strictly Orthodox organisation, the Vaad Hatzalah, an American group which focused on yeshivot and religious infrastructure. While the Vaad Hatzalah's objective and target group were somewhat different, in most of its methods the organisation mirrored the JDC. Indeed, the two American organisations cooperated frequently in their efforts to help European Jews.<sup>44</sup> Sociology thereby afforded a zone of contact rather than of conflict for the various branches of European Jewry.

### Conclusion

After 1945 sociology became an unavoidable force in the reconstruction of continental European Jewish communities. First, it was perceived as an objective methodology that offered a shared language across the borders of religious and ideological divisions. As such it was part of an effort to create a united European Jewish body, as contrasted with the pre-war divisions between Orthodox, Reform, and secular Jews, and between Zionists, anti-Zionists, and European nationalists. Second, sociology was supposed to offer crucial quantitative data, especially regarding the composition, orientation, and needs of Jewish populations that could be used for policy making. In contrast to the pre-war period, when the leadership was supposed to know community members sufficiently well, scholarly research primarily of a sociological nature now became the prerequisite for all new policies. Third, for sociological methods and sociologically well-founded 'best practices' European Jewry took American Jewry as its example. American Jewish organisations, notably the JDC, advocated the decentring of synagogues in favour of Jewish community centres, scientific training of social staff, and close collaboration between European Jewish leadership and structures. Fourth, the transfer of American-Jewish models to Europe highlighted the specifics of the respective conditions of American and European Jews. Whereas sociology and sociologically founded 'best practices' in the United States were part of an effort to modernize and Americanize Jewish communities, in Europe the main objective was not integration but segregation. Demographic research, just as much as Jewish community centres,

44 Alex Grobman, *Battling for souls. The Vaad Hatzala rescue committee in post-war Europe* (New York: Ktav, 2004); Bart Wallet, "Om 'een uitgeteekenden joodsche levensweg'. De reconstructie van het religieuze jodendom in Nederland, 1945–1960" in: Hetty Berg en Bart Wallet (eds.), *Wie niet weg is, is gezien. Joods Nederland na 1945* (Zwolle & Amsterdam: Waanders & Joods Historisch Museum, 2010), 96–117.

aimed at locating and attracting *rehokim*, sociologically redefined as 'marginal Jews', so as to reconnect them to Jewish community life and in particular to facilitate emigration to Israel. Jewish sociology in post-war Europe was part of a major effort to reconstruct and rebuild Jewish communities, an effort that was based on scientific methods and that aimed at 'saving' all remaining Jews for the greater Jewish cause.

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